

APPENDIX

REFLECTIONS ON METHODOLOGY FOR A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA

An exposition by Professor Doctor Enrique D. Dussel, President of the Commission for Latin American Church History, given on January 3, 1973, in the meeting room of the Ecuadorian Episcopal Conference.

Your Excellency, Secretary General of CELAM, Monseñor Alfonso Trujillo; Your Excellency, Auxiliary Bishop of Quito, Monseñor Antonio González; esteemed Director of IPLA, Presbítero Segundo Galilea; colleagues of the Commission; and invited Consultive Members. I trust that you will interpret these words as reflections that are not intended to exclude other points of view. My explicit purpose is to propose some programmatical or hypothetical aids and material for our dialogue during this day of work together. For this reason I have entitled my remarks, ..A " history of the Church and not "The" history of the Church, for only God himself has the complete, accurate, and unique understanding of the history which will finally be revealed to us at the Judgment and which we now anticipate analogically by faith.

My exposition will be in three parts: anthropological-historical, theological, and epistemological reflections. I want to begin with an outline of the fundamental question that we face, and avoid repeating the common equivocation among historians of the Church in Latin America.

“Methodology” suggests to us -as a composite word of Greek origin, a *lógos* or thinking regarding method (from *meta* + *hodos* way), that is, thinking about the procedure or process for attaining an objective, a mode of inquiry employing a systematic procedure or technique -a way of doing something. Methodology is, therefore, a reflection on the procedure one utilizes. It is one thing to follow an habitual method and quite another thing to reflect carefully on the method one follows. -

In these reflections, I will propose a certain method by which I will describe a history of the Church in Latin America. The subject will be approached by actual and not abstract historians, and these historians will discover the theme in order to express it, that is, in order to begin to write history. But in order to describe the subject one must discover the *meaning* of the ecclesial events. The discovery of the meaning will be attained by putting oneself within a certain horizon of comprehension in a way that it becomes impossible to give a description which is not at the same time a discovery of the meaning. And this description will always be an *interpretation*. For the Christian to discover the meaning of the something within a horizon of comprehension is to uncover something by faith which at the same time has been established by revelation. If the Christian historian is to interpret an event, it is inevitable that he do so in

the light of faith. The revealed faith may or may not be made clear by a theology. But in science this clarification is necessary. The historical-scientific interpretation should set forth clearly the norms or categories of faith illuminated by theology in order to know how to interpret the ecclesial event.

Historical-scientific interpretation is a part of this unique theology as the methodical Christian interpretation of the history of the Christian people.

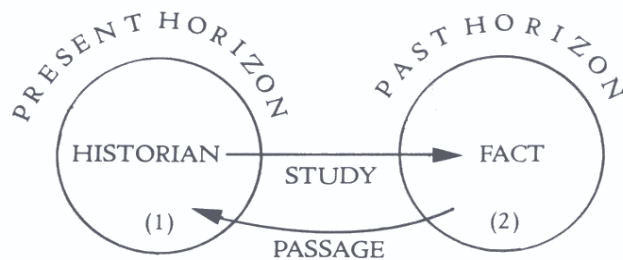
I. ANTHROPOLOGIC-HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS ON LATIN AMERICAN CULTURE

What is the meaning of Latin America in universal history?

The historian is one who charts a course from history and gives a scientific expression to what has happened. Yet, the historian is always in a world, and this is his problem. Before becoming a man of science, the historian already has a certain horizon of understanding of what has happened.

From his daily horizon the historian begins to study the subject or the historical event. An historical event can only be expressed, however, after discovering the meaning of the event. The historian, therefore, is always in danger of lapsing into an ingenuousness, especially when he believes that he is about to give an *objective* and scientific interpretation for an times. The truth is, the historian will only objectify the biases he has always held and continually holds.

The horizon of daily comprehension of one who studies history is that which gives meaning to what is studied. The fundamental horizon of comprehension is the common horizon of the historian, the everyday horizon of the historian. If we are Latin Americans, Latin America then constitutes our everyday horizon of understanding. But if we are also part of an intellectual elite formulated in Europe, our horizon of understanding will be of that world. The *meaning* of the event which is the object of our study lies always within a certain horizon. And one must recognize this horizon in order to describe the meaning of the event in question.



To this one must add that the event, the object of study, is not only “present” in the sense that it is occurring *now*, but also in the sense that it is a *past* event. But to say that an event is past signifies that it “*was-in-a-world*” that now ..is not.”

The historian lives in his *world* (1). Meanwhile, the theme or subject of his study is in *its world* (2). It was a fact that “*was-in-a-world*” but no longer is. To illustrate, let us take an example. Today, when one walks up to the Acropolis in Athens and enters the Parthenon, he sees no longer a real and sacred temple, but rather a tourist site. But for those in the Greek world, to enter the Parthenon was to enter a holy place, a place dedicated to the worship of the gods. The Parthenon “*was-in-a-world*,” but this “world” no long exists. The reconstruction or historical description should, therefore, begin by recreating the horizon of comprehension of a world in which the

past event made "sense" for that world. When we encounter such an event from within the horizon of our present world, we must consider with care the "passage" that formulates *from* that horizon which "was" (the past world of this event) to our horizon where the "fact" is, in such a way that the past event will have a new "meaning," "our" meaning, a meaning distinct from that which it had in the past world.

There are two ways in which one can approach the past. The first is to approach it ingenuously. The other is to approach it critically. The ingenuous approach is that which objectifies in the past a present meaning of the events. The critical approach is that which attempts to recreate the conditions that made possible the past historical event. Let me illustrate the difference with the following example. Ingenuously one can applaud and regard as heroes Simón Bolívar and San Martín. But critically, if we see San Martín in his historical context, we will recognize that he led a rebellion against his fellow Spanish soldiers who were for the most part "royalists," and that he was considered by them to be a "traitor." San Martín disobeyed the Spanish laws, "the Laws of the Indies" (before which he was a lawbreaker), and he risked the possibility of being condemned by the Pope who had issued the Bull *Etsi Longissimo*, January 30, 1816, which condemned the struggle for independence. San Martín's acts placed his Christian conscience in a state of culpability. Nowadays it is easy to applaud those heroes, but it is quite another thing to understand *critically* the historical conditions that produced them. It is even more difficult to imitate them today.

A *critical* interpretation presupposes taking into account the multiple aspects and conditionings of all kinds that historians in general, and even more so the historians of the Church, tend to ignore. This is precisely the problem of the *hermeneutic* or question of *interpretation*. To illustrate the magnitude of this problem, let me propose as a second example an interpretation of the "Latin American fact" in universal history. I am, of course, aware that mine is merely one possible "interpretation" among others. In our contemporary world how can we describe the "meaning" of Latin American culture in universal history? Darcy Ribeiro has attempted an outline in which Latin America has a "place" in his history. Toynbee, Spengler, Sorokin, and Weber have - as Leopoldo Zea said-left Latin America "outside of history."

But Latin America has a unique place in universal history, and therefore the Latin American Church also has a unique place in the history of the universal Church.

1. *The first stage*, Latin American prehistory, is found in our great neolithic civilizations, the history of the Maya-Aztec and Inca, and to a lesser degree of the Chibcha. Our prehistory is related to universal prehistory by way of the Pacific.

If we begin our historical description with Mesopotamia or with Egypt, India, or China in the fourth millennium before Christ, then we will be describing history much earlier than the great Maya-Aztec or Inca cultures, both of which developed during the first millennium after Christ. The Maya-Aztec of Mexico, the Inca of Peru, and the Chibcha in the Magdalena and Cauca valleys were the cultures of "nuclear America," leaving aside the areas of the tropical agriculturalists and the nomads of the plains and pampas of both North and South America.

Latin America entered neolithic universal history with the migration that began in the Euro-Asiatic continent, transversing the Pacific and arriving in America, and it would be entirely inexplicable to deal with the prehistory of Latin America and ignore the neolithic history of the Polynesians or the paleolithic history of the Euro-Asiatics and the Africans from whom the original American people developed not too many millennia ago. This would be the first stage of our history.

2. *The second stage*, if it is to be understood, must also recover the history of the

eastern Mediterranean region, In order to know who Columbus is, we must complete our description. An understanding of Latin American history demands that Latin Americans comprehend all of universal history. And only after comprehending universal and Latin American history can we ask ourselves the meaning of the history of the Church. Thus, in order to know who Columbus is, one must begin with the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures as well as those of the Anatolic and the Cretan cultures. We must understand in particular the history of the Indo-European invasions. For the Indo-Europeans invaded southern Europe, coming from the areas north of the Black and Caspian seas, and in a relatively short time they dominated the great cultures of the "half Moon" and Indo-Europeanized the areas of the Roman Empire, the Persian Empire, the Hindu kingdom, and even the Chinese Empire so influenced by the "Tao."

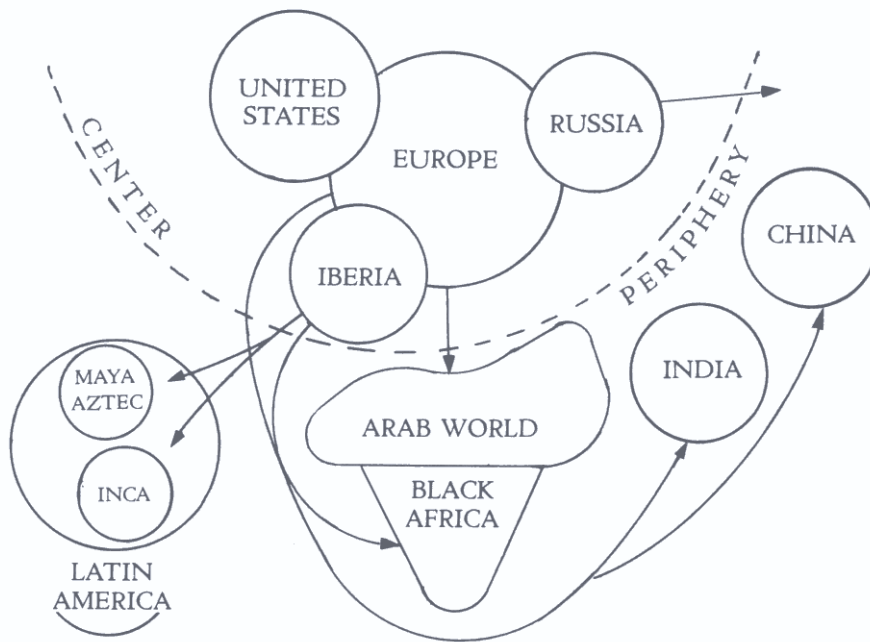
3. *The third stage* resulted from the great Semitic migrations. The Semites, from whom emerged Christianity, had another perspective of the world, and therefore another perspective of history. A few centuries after the beginning of Christianity, the whole of the Roman Empire had been Christianized. Later the Persian world was "Islamized," and Muslims eventually arrived as far East as India. Thus one can assert that there has been a kind of "Semitization" of the neolithic cultic world which earlier had been "Indo-Europeanized." And from this process there emerged two great Christendoms: the Latin and the Byzantine-Russian. Both of them -the Latin and the Greek -dominated the world later referred to as European and in which Spain was a single province. All of these events are a part of our *protohistory*, and we must understand well the Christendom of our historical origins. From A.D.330, the year that Constantinople was founded, until the day that Columbus sailed for America - the same year that the Spanish were able to reconquer Granada and expel the Arab Moors -the history of the two Christendoms was completed.

To understand this process is to understand who is Columbus, who are the majority of the missionaries, and who are the majority of our first bishops, that is, to understand the history of the *Patronato*. Latin America and the Latin American Church are incomprehensible without understanding this history.

4. *The fourth stage* can be called protohistory. I would begin our history with the day in which the most western of the West-Spain-and the most eastern of the East -the Indians (the Indians were Asiatics) -encountered each other in what was the process of conquest and evangelization, the great process of aculturation. In 1492 the history of Latin America began not as "the-father-Spain" nor "the-mother-India," but rather as a child which was neither Indian nor European, but something completely distinct.

From this history Latin America soon emerged. Byzantium was a world, an ecumene, as was Russia (the "third Rome"), Latin Europe, the Arabs, the Hindus, and the Chinese. Together they comprised six coexistent ecumenes. But the Aztecs and the Incas were also ecumenes. In all there were in the fifteenth century eight ecumenes. Each of them believed itself to be the only ecumene and contended that outside their horizons lived infidels and barbarians.

But in the sixteenth century one ecumene conquered all the others, and the first to be oppressed was America. Latin America was to carry in its essence the new historical European oppressive moment. Europe, in the center, would bypass the Arab world and arrive in Asia. Soon it would touch America by way of the Pacific. From the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, a new world structure developed: the eight ecumenes were reduced to one, and the "center" of this ecumene was first Europe, then the United States and Russia -after which one could add Japan, Canada, and Australia.



Europe thus conquered the Orient, weakened the Arab world, and conquered and colonized Africa and America. There developed, therefore, a “center” and a “periphery.” Europe constituted the center and created the periphery, and the center would have as one pole of expansion Russia -for Russia expanded through Siberia to the Pacific on the East during the sixteenth century -and Spain and Portugal as the other pole of expansion via the Atlantic. In the twentieth century -following the Second World War-the center would be constituted by the United States, Europe, and Russia. Historically, Latin America remained with Black Africa, Islam, India, China, and Southeast Asia as peripheral cultures, dependent upon the central macroculture. Latin America remained as a part of the periphery, yet as the only underdeveloped part of post-Christendom. For the other peripheral cultures were dominated by Islam, animism, Hinduism, the Maoist revolution, and Buddhism in Southeast Asia. This is to say that during the period following World War II, Latin America was the only dependent area in Christendom, the only colonial Christendom. Neither Latin nor Byzantine Christendom could be said to have been dependent. This interpretive outline, therefore, attempts to respond to the question: what is the meaning of Latin American culture in universal history? Now we are ready to pose the second question

II. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA

What is the meaning of the history of the Church in Latin America? What function does the Church have in the history of this continent? We are ill-prepared to respond

regarding the function of a single part, such as the meaning of the history of the Latin American Church, until we have established the meaning of the whole. But the fact is, an answer for the "whole" of our culture does not exist, because an adequate history of Latin American culture does not exist except for the programmatic studies written by Darcy Ribeiro as we mentioned above. It is possible, however, that if we ask ourselves how to write a history of the Church we will at the same time advance the question of how to give an exposition of a history of Latin America in a critical way. There is a world, in the sense indicated above, where the pre-Christian or non-Christian historian is situated. And this world, in the light of faith, acquires a new "meaning." In the pre-Christian world of the Roman Empire there was money, and from the Roman horizon of understanding the money had a certain value. But upon becoming a Christian, the Roman had another horizon of understanding opened to him, and the same money acquired a new significance, another value, because in changing his horizon of understanding the *meaning* of all intraworldly entities changed. One can say ontologically that faith is a *new world* in the sense that a new horizon of understanding opens. This existential faith, because it is living, occurs every day. It constitutes the day-by-day world, even though it is invaded from outside of this world. This exteriority is the *Word* that reveals as "light" certain questions which earlier were impossible to resolve and in some cases were even unrecognized. This illumination or exteriority is a "cone of light" that is projected upon the world and that gives the world a new meaning.

The Word of God is like a "cone of light" that illuminates in such a way that all that is intraworldly changes meaning. Faith signifies believing the Word of the Other (the Revealer, God), and it is the Word which both clarifies the new horizon of understanding and uncovers a new meaning of all that is taking place.

How can one define, therefore, revelation? What is it that reveals the revealing Word? Revelation is the manifestation of the *Christly fact* ("reality") uncovered by means of interpretive norms. God reveals these norms, coordinates, or categories that allow us to discover what we have seen but see now with a new meaning. Moses, for example, was living in the desert, and he knew that his fellow Hebrews were slaves in Egypt. This was an historical fact. But the day came when God revealed to Moses that it was possible to bring the Hebrews out of Egypt, and Moses discovered a new meaning, namely, rather than being "natural" slaves they were transformed into "historical" slaves. From continuing to live as slaves they were transformed in the eyes of faith into beings who could possibly be freed from their Egyptian prison. The revelation consisted in gaining a different understanding of the same historical fact. And this new *interpretation* came through the light of faith, through seeing a *new* meaning of reality. Revelation, therefore, has interpretive norms that permit us to discover the "meaning" of events. This is fundamental for the Church historian, for one who is a Christian and who proposes to interpret the same historical phenomena in a way distinct from the non-Christian. The same document, for example, will have a different meaning in the eyes of the Christian scientific historian, because his interpretive norms are different.

What are these norms? In the tradition of the Old and of the New Testament one can observe several essential interpretive categories; for example, the word *basar* in Hebrew (*sárx* in Greek and *flesh* in English). A second fundamental category is that of *ruaj* (*pneúma* in Greek and *spirit* in English). When the "Spirit" (which is the divine otherness) inhabits the "flesh" (that is, the human totality or the creature, which is able to close itself by sin or open itself to the divine gift) the "Word" (*dabár* in

Hebrew, and *lógos* in Greek) assumes humanity. Here I am speaking strictly of the “in-carnation.”

These revealed categories were utilized early by the prophets and by Christ himself in his theological teaching and preaching. One must be able to discover these categories explicitly in order to know how to use them later in historical interpretation. Beginning with the category of “flesh” -which contemporary thinking calls ..Totality" -and “Spirit,” it sins.

When the “flesh” killed Abel, Cain was transformed into Adam the sinner, because Abel was the Other, the brother; and when Cain killed him, he was left alone. Cain, being alone, declared himself to be God, and in declaring himself to be God, Cain was repeating the sin of Adam. He denied God the Creator and became a fetish worshipper . When the history of the Church is totalized- and it was totalized in the time of as a culture -then Christianity is confused with that culture. When the Church identifies itself with a culture it is unable to hear the voice of the poor (the Other) by which the Spirit speaks, and therefore in these eras it falls into sin. These times are when Christians become closed as an earthly institution and are unable to observe clearly the presence of God in the poor who reveal injustice. The Church can even play at being the Church, and by not serving the poor it can be a part of those who dominate the poor.

Another interpretive norm is faith, and for this reason that which in Hebrew is called *habodáh* (*diakonía* in Greek, the act of the *doulos*, and service in English or simply work) is both biblical and evangelical. Jesus indicated that it is characteristic of the “world” that those who have power oppress the weak, but that his followers are characterized by “serving” the poor and the weak. The category of *service* (which is more than *praxis* in that it indicates the gratitude of one who serves the other as other and not because of “necessity”) refers to the action of the “Servant of Yahweh.” It is liberating action (Isaiah 61: 1ff.). It is when the “flesh” is resurrected by “Spirit” to new life and is both opened to the poor and serves the poor effectively. Thus the “worship” of the temple is divine 'service" (*habodáh*), and “service” (*habodáh*) to the poor is the worship rendered to Jesus who identified with the poor (Matthew 25:11ff.). This service effects “release from prison” (God said to Moses, “Lehitsaló,” that is, “Bring them out,” “Liberate them”) for the slave. And this idea of liberation is truly biblical and Christian (cf. Exodus 3). When the “flesh” is closed, it becomes of necessity the dominator of the poor. Now we move closer to the essential category for the history of the Church. For if the Church is only relating a history of itself as an earthly institution -and it does this well in triumphalist histories -it can be a history of its alliance with the dominating powers. Meanwhile, if the gestures of solidarity with the poor are studied together with service to the poor, a strictly evangelical norm will be indicated.

There are many other categories that could be mentioned, but these are indicative of those which can be utilized from the Christian faith.

From this perspective one can ask, “What is the Church?” The Church is a *prophetic-institution* in the sense that it is an institution in the world fulfilling an eschatological and prophetic task in order to move history forward from the poor. There are cultures that turn in upon themselves as totalities such as the Roman Empire. The Church, committing itself to the poor who are always the dominated, pushes the process toward the future, and in this case toward the Holy Roman Empire. And from the Holy Roman Empire the Church formulated Europe. When the “flesh” turns in

upon itself as a totality or sin, the Church from the poor pushes history eschatologically toward Christ who comes, who lives as future although already present. If a system turns in upon itself as a complete totality, it fossilizes. The Church in the history of the people comes to remind them that their ultimate destiny is beyond all historical kingdoms. The Church is an institution, but it is a prophetic institution. The Church is in the world, and because of this it can be allied with the dominators or with the poor. One is reminded of the parable of the seeds. There are seeds that fall in poor soil and other seeds that fall in good soil. Those that fall in good soil can germinate and grow. Both categories of seed can, however, represent the Church, and grace is operative in both. But it is the Church of the 'poor,' the Church of the 'Just,' that allows the seed to grow.

The Church is an institution in the world, and at the same time it serves as the exteriority of the Word, as 'outside' of the world criticizing culture and all totality in order to move history toward the Parousia.

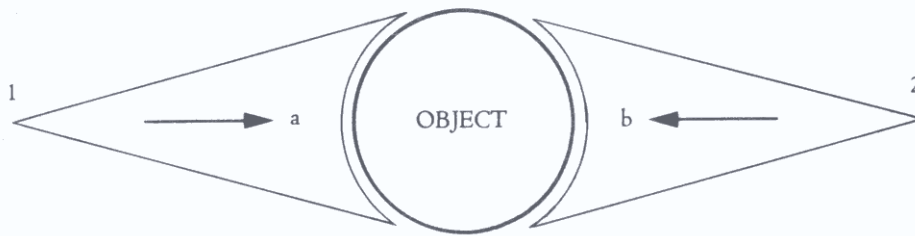
Consider the following incidents in Latin American history and ask, ..Which is the more important? Was it the founding of the Archbishopric of Santo Domingo, Concepción de la Vega, and Puerto Rico, or the preaching of Antonio de Montesinos on that Sunday of Advent in 1511 ? Which ecclesiastical fact is more relevant?" We know that the episcopal institution is fundamental, but the prophetic announcement of Montesinos is also essential. It is necessary, however, to attempt to discover the meaning of the events in the light of the categories of the Christian faith.

III. REFLECTIONS ON THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROTOCOL OF CHURCH HISTORY AS AN HISTORICAL SCIENCE

Only now are we ready to deal with the third subject of this exposition: the epistemological protocol of history, or the history of the Church as a science. At what level are we going to deal with the question? We know that historical science follows a system of investigation called the "historical method." Also, we are aware of the "external criticism" of historical documents (there is also "internal criticism") by which the historian studies ancient writings and inscriptions. These questions regarding any document are asked: Is it authentic or a forgery? What is the date? How was it preserved, discovered, and passed on to us? Along with history are the auxiliary sciences such as sociology, economics, law, psychology, and philosophy. These auxiliary sciences have not been utilized adequately in the writing of the history of the Church in Latin America. But this is not the basic problem. Let us leave aside the fact that the historian of the Church is ..an historian," simply because he has acquired the use of the scientific method -if not in the universities, then by the extensive studies of historical documents (many of the Church historians are neither licentiates nor doctors in history, but after thirty or forty years of historical investigation they have become competent historians). The historical method can be perfected not only through university studies, but also by the constant and diligent investigation into the authenticity of historical documentation.

All methods, however, have their limitations, including all of the human sciences. This fact presents a twofold problem.

First, it is impossible in all sciences to attain *total* objectivity. What do we mean by total "objectivity"? The truth is, we have a contradiction in terms, because the historian always views an historical event from one point of view (1) -his object (a). If another historian views the same object from another point of view (2), obviously he will see it differently (b).



This would indicate that objectivity regarding the object from 1 is not pure or total, but rather limited and localized. Some would say that this is "relativism." We should clarify, however, what we mean by "relative." If by relative we mean that a human being is finite and is limited to his historical situation, then our position would be one of "relativism." But if by relative we mean to say that there is no manner of truth - which is patently false - then what we are saying is not relativistic because we affirm truth. Furthermore, everything can be considered from a perspective that not only is relative, but also that is absolute for everyone situated or localized in the same sense. Everything can be viewed from various perspectives and thereby suggest diverse "meanings" of the object (the meaning from perspective a is not the same as from b). Pure "objectivity," however, signifies analyzing an object from all points of view, which means not to analyze it as an object at all. Only the divine creative intelligence can attain this kind of objectivity. Pure "objectivity" does not exist. What does exist is situated objectivity.

Second, nonsubjectivity is also impossible. When one regards a description as *objective*, he is classifying the statement as being exempt from all subjective participation. But this is impossible for reasons already stated. All human consideration of any particular subject will be affected by *subjective* historical, sociological, and economic conditionings. And to assume that a description is objective is something quite distinct. This is not to say that a description should not be subjective, nor that objectivity is pure, but that there has to be a methodical access of subjectivity to objectivity. Subjectivity can be nonmethodical, that is, it can attack an object from various perspectives, opinionated or vulgar. One can say out of ignorance, for example, that something is from the eighteenth century when in fact it is from the sixteenth. One makes this mistake because the movement is not methodical toward the object. But even the scientist is unable to leave aside completely his subjectivity, and his methodical subjectivity will be in one way or another a subjectivity. Those who pretend that this subjectivity should not exist, and that objectivity should be absolute or pure -and only then is a description -are saying something very dangerous since they naively objectify a political, economic, or social option, assuming that it is valid for everyone. This is precisely what has happened in the history of the Latin American Church. To historicize objectivity and to historicize subjectivity is to be able to agree on the historicity of an object. It is to take into consideration all the conditionings that this can signify. *Methodical* subjectivity is called by Ricoeur "transcendental subjectivity" in the sense that it *transcends* more common, opinionated subjectivity and knows how to manage the subject scientifically. But even transcendental subjectivity is an interpretation of the "fact" from *a certain point of view*, which is not the only point of view. The recognition of this truth is very important in the study of the history of the Church, because one cannot write a history from all points of view nor for all Christians, since this would imply that the history has been written by God himself. For God is the only one who has a pure objective perspective of history as it really is. There is,

therefore, the following difficulty: if one desires to write a noncommitted history, what he will write will be in fact an anecdotal history which in the last analysis will support the status quo. On the other hand, an historical non-Christian subjectivity will also interpret the same facts and their meaning from a concrete existential horizon, not in the light of faith, and will discover *another* "meaning." Likewise, a methodical historical Christian subjectivity will discover still a *different* "meaning" in the same events, not because the non-Christian interpretation constitutes scientific history while a Christian interpretation is an ideological history. Rather, it is because the horizons of comprehension are different. The truth is that each is an interpretation from a certain perspective and with a certain commitment. To say that an historian is not a Christian is not to say that he is not committed. He can be a liberal, a Marxist, a Buddhist, or a capitalist. He is committed, and he interprets a fact and gives it a certain meaning according to his commitment.

All of this is directly related to our proposed history of the Church in Latin America. For what is called the science of the history of the Church is epistemologically situated in a strictly *scientific* framework, because the method utilized is scientific. Those who write this history will be recognized as historians because of their descriptive works of historical facts. But this will be an intrinsically theological work because, in their methodical interpretation, these historians will be clearly aware of the Christian categories they are using in the description of the historical facts. One cannot first describe an historical fact and then proceed to interpret it, for the description is already an interpretation. The study of an authentic document can be "utilized" in various ways. Why, for example, does one historian extract the first paragraphs of a letter while another selects two paragraphs from the heart of the letter, and a third chooses two closing paragraphs? And why when selecting the same paragraphs does one historian ascribe one meaning while the other ascribes a second meaning? The reason is that each historian is interpreting the letter, even when he first reads it, as an important document selected from the thousands studied. Is the description, therefore, *purely* "objective"? No, the description is an interpretation resulting from the historical method utilized *a priori*, giving rise to many different explanations. The document will be verified by both the Christian and the non-Christian in regard to its authenticity. But each one will extract a different meaning because the horizon of interpretation of each is different.

A methodical interpretation of the history of the Church is an intrinsic art in theology if our understanding of art is that which is commonly accepted today. If theology is understood to be a syllogistic dogmatic (*more graecorum*), then the history of the Church will not be a part of theology. For that dogmatic has left the history of the Church outside of its constitution. In the Old and New Testaments and in the early Church fathers, history was a constituent part of theological reflection. If the theological categories utilized are not clearly determined, then the interpretation will be commonplace or even anti-Christian, because one can unconsciously use certain interpretive categories of a particular historical school of thought which is not Christian. The fact is that some histories of the Church are anti-Christian in their interpretation of the facts. For this reason it is necessary to know the Christian interpretive norms of day-to-day events or facts.

What can happen with the interpretation of the Christian historian? Our Church historians can be objective, *de hecho*, ingenuously, and their cultural and political option or bias can be held naturally, eternally, as valid for everyone. But they can forget or overlook the fact that an historian is in his world and that his world conditions his interpretation. One can incorrectly assume that by being an interpretation according

to the historical scientific method, his interpretation is pure and not affected by any a priori option. But it is easy to note his choice simply by looking at what he has written. For usually his history is of the "great," of those called "the best" (*aristós* in Greek), that is, an aristocratic history. What about a history of the poor? Where is the history of the Indians, of the mulattoes, of the mestizos? What about the history of the oppressed Latin American people? Is it about to be written? Why? Because the choice is made; it is already made. Historians have described a certain kind of Christianity and have left aside the other. The documental maneuvering was at times methodically established, given the fact that the selection of documents was partial. Some were utilized at one level, but other levels were ignored. And the interpretation given was from a certain bias that was assumed to be unbiased. This was and is doubly dangerous. The description can be scientific because the scientific method is used. But at the same time the interpretation can be from an a-critical perspective. An a-critical interpretation has been purged of that which is "Christian," because the Christian faith always functions critically regarding an event. Thus an a-critical description, even though it is scientific, is in reality secular and makes Church history a secular exercise in the sense that it lacks the criticism of Christianity that prophetically interprets secular historical events.

Furthermore, history is almost always written from the perspective of the elite culture, which is culturally dependent. We have been educated in universities and seminaries in Europe or under European influence, and all of this has given us a certain perspective of reality. And even though we write "scientific" descriptions (this is considered a given), our interpretation is terribly defective.

The following is a suggested typology of positions in which one finds certain Church historians in Latin America.

1. Some give an anecdotal description -and all description is interpretation -of the period of colonial Christendom. Nearly all of the chronicles and the accounts of our colonial history until the nineteenth century are anecdotal descriptions, and they describe events from the Spanish perspective. Today there are many historians who are beginning to work from the *perspective of the defeated*, that is, from that of the Indians. To them reality appears distinct. The first description is basically documental and serves to relate the facts, even though strictly speaking it is not an historical or scientific account.
2. Some histories are written as a liberal, anticonservative description. These were especially prevalent in the nineteenth century when, beginning about 1850, liberalism erupted. History is thus transformed until today (and this is the history that is taught in our educational institutions in almost all Latin American countries) and is an ideological instrument of the education of the people. History, upon achieving a self-interpretation of a culture, permits one to say when the country began who were the "good guys" and who were the "bad guys." Our oligarchies, our liberals, wrote (almost "invented") a history in order to explain the beginning of their glorious acts. Liberal states objectify in their histories their day-to-day naive attitudes as an ideological struggle.
3. Some have written a "revisionist" description, traditional, antiliberal, and *apologetic*. Many of our Church historians are not exempt from this ideological position. Theirs is also a struggle that is not basically scientific. To put it another way, this attitude -that of the "revisionist" -is, however, more "scientific" or documented than those above, not leaving aside the commitment, and for this reason is no less ideological. We could say they are "scientificistic" in the sense that they are opposed to the liberals

by the force of their documents and deny that there is any commitment. They pretend, therefore, that their "scientific," methodically written history is true, a real and not an interpretive description, without recognizing that sooner or later the scientific method is an interpretation that can be ideological, and for this reason it is concealing rather than revealing. Some historians of the Latin American Church can be thus classified because they believe that they have approached the thousands of documents scientifically and have not been biased in their interpretation, that their description is "purely objective," and that they have therefore discovered reality. The position that generally denies the "black legend" is Hispanic. Ferdinand and Charles V have been so maligned that historians now deal with them in such a way as to overlook the fact that they were less than perfect. They also tend to forget the contribution of Bartolomé de las Casas who, according to Menéndez Pidal, was paranoid. In regard to this third position, it is very difficult to be dispassionate because we are too close to the antiliberal struggle.

4. One possible option or choice for writing a history of the Church in Latin America is the *explicitly Christian critical approach*, which utilizes all of the appropriate values of the traditional positions. It is necessary to recover the contributions of the apologetic or Hispanic position that characterized the notable studies of the colonial era. Yet, at the same time, it is necessary to recognize the contribution of the liberals and not depreciate what many of them have done for the present constitution of our nations. Also, we should remember the indigenous position. The critical attitude, therefore, utilizes the best from all of these positions, but the critical Christian attitude, the attitude that keeps in mind which ones can be the essential criteria, determines whether the interpretation will be unequivocally Christian.

If a team of scientists proposes to write a history of the Church they should constitute themselves into a coherent body in order to give unity to their work. They should determine the norms that will allow them to describe the beginning and the development of the Latin American Church in a coherent and unified manner. When we consider one of the important European histories, such as the history of the Church by Fliche-Martin, which is a history of the Universal Church written by French historians, we see the Church from the perspective of a French historical school. This school manifests a unity of perspectives. But it appears that such a Latin American Christian school of history does not exist. It is quite possible that there are historians, scientists, who maintain the same point or a similar point of view who could become a team and in time also constitute a school. We will achieve this in one way or another, and if we do not, what we will produce as historians will be the contradictory juxtapositioning of interpretations which, rather than revealing the beginning and the development of the Church, will result in contradictory descriptions without meaning. Here is the difficulty.

The difficulty also arises from the fact that no one can write an official interpretation. The Church does not have an official interpretation, or if it does it is only the Holy Scripture, the Pontifical or episcopal declarations, and lastly the final Judgment of God. Any history that one attempts to write should be a serious and scientific interpretation of the history of the Church written by Christian historians who necessarily opt for certain criteria.

In reference to the revealed criteria of historical interpretation there is one absolutely essential principle, and for history it can transform itself into a revealer of its strictly Christian character. One can make the following statement: outside of the present totality, outside of an organized system (the "flesh") the poor are unsheltered and

defenseless. But the poor are Jesus. In the Gospel of Matthew it is very clear that one who gives food to the hungry is in fact giving food to Jesus (chapter 25). Therefore, a theological reflection regarding the identification of Jesus with the poor is one of the present goals -perhaps the most important-of contemporary Latin American theology. The poor are poor because they are of no intrinsic value to the system. If value in the system is medieval honor, then the poor have no value. If the supreme operational value of the system is money, the poor have none. If in the future society the system has technology as the supreme value, the poor will be those without technology. The poor are the exterior or *outside* of that which is considered of value in the totality (the "flesh"). For to be exterior is to be *outside*, to be in the *future* - and because the poor are in the future -interpolating eschatologically the system. The poor are Jesus in that his word, his interpolative word reveals God to us today. He who sees Jesus in the poor and serves him is the only one who can be saved. It appears that this should be the essential *criterion* of our history. It would be a history that raises questions regarding whatever problem and whatever description, questions such as: What relation does this have with the poor? When we study, for example, the encounter of Columbus with the Indian, what should we ask ourselves ? Who is the more significant, Columbus or the Indian ? The Indian as ..the poor" should be the one who interests us the most. And when we discover how Columbus acted in regard to the Indian, we are in a position to judge the "Columbus" fact. Many times we have interpreted the historical facts by inverting them. We have acclaimed Pizarro a hero, for example, while at the same time we have ignored the Indians. We should remember that the "poor" are not poor only economically and politically or in an economic-political sense. The fact is that biblically the poor (*anabim*) is essentially the ..servant of Yahweh," the one who opens the '.Word" and who gives himself unto death in the service of God. We are speaking of the prophet. But also, the poor are those who receive the service of the prophet. In the parable of the Samaritan, Jesus teaches us that the Samaritan is poor (in the fullest and most perfect sense), but also .'the poor" is the assaulted and abandoned one on the road. Thus the *poor* are .'the poor ones" in the real, economic, and cultural sense, not that they are merely alienated by the system, but are in reality exterior to the system and aware that they are not a part of "this world"; and those who struggle in their behalf are the prophets, the *anabim*, the "Servant of Yahweh."

Conclusion. In the only history-secular history for those pre-Christians, and the history of salvation for the Christians in the light of faith, the Church signifies a distinct reality. For this reason the history of the Church is an interpretive account of the messianic function fulfilled by the institution founded in the only history, the history of the world in the light of faith. To discover the messianic function of the Church in the world is theology, the only theology, in its moment of historical and progressive description.

Quito, Ecuador, January 3, 1973.

An unwritten address that has been preserved and translated in the oral style despite the fact that it shows a certain awkwardness of syntax.